

Cenla lawmakers watching, waiting as redistricting keeps changing

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BATON ROUGE — Central Louisiana state Reps. Chris Roy Jr. and James Armes hung around all day during a redistricting hearing in the State Capitol, waiting to testify in the testy atmosphere that has pitted colleague against colleague and made allies of foes as politicians fight to retain districts in which they've grown comfortable.



Roy



Armes

Roy of Alexandria and Armes of Leesville, both Democrats, were seatmates at the beginning of their legislative careers in the House, taking their first oaths of office in January 2008. At the beginning of the Legislature's special session on redistricting that began Sunday, both were confronted with the possibility of having to run against each other. That scenario has changed a few times since Sunday.

For most of the day Wednesday, Armes and Roy attended the House and Governmental Affairs Committee hearings on how to reshape Louisiana's House

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districts while adhering to 2010 Census reality that showed significant population movements from the New Orleans area.

Much of the debate centered on Ruston Rep. Rick Gallot's amendment to HB1 to increase the number of minority districts in Caddo Parish.

Both waited to testify on legislation affecting their

districts but never did. That probably will come later if events behind the scenes don't turn out as they like.

"Really, I don't have the latest," Armes said Wednesday after a squeaker committee vote — 10-9 — approved the formation of an extra minority district in Caddo Parish, which now has three of six House districts with a majority of minority voters. The committee vote, if passed by the full House and Senate, would

up the number of minority districts in Caddo to four for the next 10 years.

Roy said the committee vote on Caddo "sends ripples through our area" of Central Louisiana. As it stands now, Roy said he might find himself in a district that pits him against Rep. Herbert Dixon of Alexandria, who also took office in 2008.

Dixon represents Rapides' lone minority district, and is Central Louisiana's lone representative on one of

the two legislative committees drawing up political districts.

Dixon recalled how details of prospective plans had been laid out in meetings with lawmakers.

At some point in all hearings this week there has been acrimonious debate, such as Wednesday when Rep. Barbara M. Norton, a minority representative from Shreveport who is a member of the Legislative Black Caucus, was unhappy with the way her district

was redrawn in the amended bill. She said she had not been fully informed about the demographic numbers in Caddo and the plans to redraw her district.

"I'm hoping and I'm praying that we as legislators will not come to this mic and lie on one another," Norton said.

Dixon did not respond to Norton's comment.

"I have been called a lot of things," responded Gallot. "Liar is not one of them."